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PROLEGOMENA TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.

I.

THE NEED OF THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.

HERBERT SPENCER begins his *Study of Sociology* with a chapter emphasizing the practical need of it; in like manner, perhaps, there is no better way of entering upon a discussion of the subject of social psychology than by pointing out the theoretical need of such a science. This paper accordingly will be a plea for the study of social psychology, with an attempt to show the necessity of it by a partial inventory of the problems dependent upon a social psychology for their scientific solution. Some sort of social psychology, it is true, has usually been assumed by social science; but the plea of this article is for a systematically worked out and carefully verified social psychology as a condition of complete social knowledge. For, if it be assumed that the phenomena of society are chiefly psychical, a knowledge of the psychical processes which characterize group-life as such is manifestly a most important condition of complete social knowledge.

A few preliminary statements of position may, however, be helpful in rendering our plea more intelligible.

Kölpe speaks of social psychology as the science which "treats of the mental phenomena dependent upon a community of individuals."¹ This we may accept as a rough, working definition of the science. Now, the assumption that there are "mental phenomena dependent upon a community of individuals" presupposes psychical processes which are more than *merely* individual, which are *inter-individual*; in last analysis it implies that through the action and reaction of individuals in a group upon one another there arise psychical processes which cannot be explained by reference to any or all of the individuals

¹ See KÖLPE'S *Outlines of Psychology*, translated by Titchener, p. 7; cf. also the original.

as such, but only by reference to the group-life considered itself as a unity. Social psychology, then, if somewhat more strictly defined, has as its task to examine and explain the form or mechanism of these group psychical processes. It is an interpretation of the psychical processes manifested in the growth and functioning of a group as a unity. Whatever psychical phenomena may be regarded as *pertaining to group-life as such* are, therefore, the proper subject-matter of social psychology. As such phenomena we may instance, for the sake of provisional illustration, political revolutions, mob action, group action, and organization of all sorts, down even to the psychical adjustments which take place in small groups, such as a family or a committee. Whether these facts are properly classified among those of social psychology or among those of individual psychology we cannot here discuss: the logical delimitation of the facts with which the two sciences respectively deal, and a discussion of the problems therein involved, must be reserved for a later article.

It is here acknowledged, however, that if the abstraction of the individual from the group and of the group from the individual is an unjustifiable abstraction for any purpose whatsoever, as some may assert, then the creation of a separate science of social psychology is also unjustifiable. Again, it is conceded that, if individual psychology can explain all the phenomena of group-life, as some individualists maintain, social psychology as a science has little excuse for existence. But the individualistic hypothesis, it must be added, needs demonstration quite as much as its opposite, and as yet such demonstration seems decidedly wanting. Indeed, it is notorious that psychology has up to the present failed to furnish that aid in the solution of social problems which was expected from it a half century ago. It may be suspected that a reason for this is that psychology has been developed too much on its purely individualistic side, and has neglected the not less real psychical processes of group-life.

Here another possible misunderstanding must be guarded against. In emphasizing the importance of social psychology

we do not mean to imply that it can furnish a complete interpretation of society. There are many physical phenomena of land and climate, and many physiological phenomena of race and population, which are not less than psychical facts to be taken into account in a complete interpretation of society, but which social psychology as such cannot consider. Hence an objective as well as a subjective interpretation is essential for the proper understanding of the social life: neither alone will yield complete knowledge of society; both are necessary for the understanding, not only of society as a whole, but of any particular side of societary life. Nor is the subjective or psychological interpretation to be set over against the objective or biological interpretation; both are parts of a philosophic whole, and each is supplementary to the other.

The objective interpretation of society has been, perhaps, sufficiently developed and emphasized during the present century by such men as Comte, Spencer, Buckle, and their followers. They regarded the physical and objective as fundamental, and brought in the subjective and mental only as modifications of the physical. Hence they treated the science of society logically as a physical science. In this proceeding they were justified, since they all explicitly or implicitly denied that the actions of men are independent phenomena having laws of their own. It is because we question, however, on methodological grounds the rightfulness of such an assumption that we would now shift the emphasis from the objective to the subjective interpretation. We do not question the value of an objective interpretation; it is absolutely necessary to any complete understanding of the social process; but experience has shown that it is inadequate to explain the principal and characteristic features of that process; that it explains the incidental rather than the essential facts of societary life. We must, therefore, reverse the methodological order of the older sociologists and proceed from man to nature in our interpretation of society, not from nature to man.¹ That is to say, a social psychology is needed to interpret the processes

¹ Cf. PATTEN'S *Theory of Dynamic Economics*, Introduction. The methodological justification for the above position will appear in a later article.

of social growth and functioning, which are essentially psychological and subjective, before we can proceed to examine intelligently the relations of society to nature.

Now, if sociology be conceived as the complete interpretation of society, as the bringing-to-bear of all knowledge upon the problems of societary growth, structure, and function to effect their solution, it will be a synthesis of the objective with the subjective interpretation of society. In this synthesis the subjective interpretation of the social process, afforded by individual and social psychology, becomes progressively important as we pass from the lower to the higher stages of social development. Thus an objective or biological interpretation of society may seemingly answer very well for its primitive stages, but it is felt to be entirely inadequate for the interpretation of present social life with its preponderance of the psychic factor. Again, as we pass from the lower to the higher stages of society, *social* psychology becomes increasingly important for the interpretation of the social life. As social groups become more highly unified and organized, that is, "individualized," they act more and more as "individuals," and group life-processes become more definite and coherent. Corresponding to these group life-processes are psychological processes, which, though manifested in individuals, may properly be regarded as the expression of group-life. They represent the coördination and organization of the activities of group-life on its inner side. They not only function to secure those inner and outer adjustments necessary to the continuance of group-life, but they embody in themselves all those emotional and volitional attitudes, all those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, which are favorable to the persistence of solidarity, and growth of the group. They hand down in unbroken tradition the ideas, valuations, and methods which have been to the group of life-saving advantage. Thus group psychological processes become the great vehicle of progress; and group or social psychology, rather than individual psychology, must interpret the general method or mechanism of that progress. If this reasoning be substantially correct—and in a later article evidence will be adduced to show that it is correct—the

need of the sociologist's studying social psychology is simply the need of developing his own science. Sociology cannot hope to become a well-organized and perfected discipline until it has, for a part of its foundation at least, a fully developed social psychology.

One particular respect may here be pointed out in which social psychology can aid in the construction of a general sociology. When conceived as social philosophy, it is evident that sociology in its genetic aspect may be regarded as the philosophy of history. Now, social psychology in its genetic aspect has also to do with the problem of a philosophy of history on its subjective side. Group psychical processes are the historical processes on their *subjective* side *par excellence*. When the genetic aspect of social psychology is fully worked out, therefore, it should yield a philosophy of history. Without entering upon any discussion of the difficulties of such a discipline, we would merely remark that such a subjective interpretation of historical processes would seem possible, if any interpretation is. If the psychical factor is the unifying, life-preserving, and life-developing factor in the group, it would seem that, if any philosophy of history whatever is attainable, it must be reached through the interpretation of the psychical process of societary development, that is, through the explanation of the process of growth of what we may, for want of a better term, call the "social mind." Such a subjective philosophy of history, however, would undoubtedly need supplementing by reference to those physical facts which constantly affect the process of social growth; and such a supplementing it would be the duty of sociology to furnish in its complete interpretation of the historico-genetic process of societies.

If the study of social psychology may be regarded as necessary to the further development of sociology, it is hardly of less importance for the special social sciences. Even that social science which from its nature is most bound by the facts of the physical world, namely, economics, would be greatly helped by the development of social psychology. Within the last twenty years economic thinkers have come to look more and more to

individual psychology for new and deeper interpretations of the economic life. They have done so with some degree of success, both because individual psychology is a factor in all social interpretation, and because of its essential unity with social psychology. Where they have failed, they have failed chiefly because they have lacked a social psychology to complete their view. Take, for instance, the problem of value. The Austrian economists were successful in explaining the phenomenon of economic value in so far as they referred it to a psychological origin; they were unsuccessful in explaining it in so far as they referred it to a purely individual origin. Economic value is now widely admitted to be a social phenomenon, to be explained only through reference to the social life as a whole, or, at least, to the life of the particular group within which it appears. The last word upon value is, however, far from said, and social psychology may yet throw much light upon this fundamental economic problem. The theory of consumption furnishes another illustration. So long as there was no subjective interpretation of the economic life, consumption occupied no place in the discussions of economic writers. Now, however, the theory of consumption is admitted to be one of the most important parts of economic science, though a satisfactory theory remains yet to be developed. As Professor Patten has pointed out, such a theory can be developed only along socio-psychological lines, since consumption is a matter of social (group) habits, customs, and feelings. It must, in other words, be worked out with the aid of social psychology. In the closely related question of economic crises the necessity of understanding the social psychological processes is even more plainly evident. Hitherto economic science has had almost no serious theory of crises. What has been written concerning them has often been worthless, and often, it is not too much to say, vague, mysterious, and superstitious. To the social psychologist, however, it is evident that economic crises are phenomena that lie wholly within the psychological process of group-life, and that their explanation is to be found in the mechanism of that process. A satisfactory theory of economic crises, if such can ever be given,

must be reached through the aid of social psychology. Illustrations of the service which social psychology might render to economic science might be multiplied *ad libitum*. Among the more important questions which must receive, in whole or in part, a socio-psychological solution are those of distribution, of the rise and persistence of economic classes or groups, of the genesis and various expression of the so-called "economic instinct," and of the relation which various economic systems bear to the political, legal, and moral systems with which they are found. But perhaps enough has been said to show that economic science has much to expect from the development of a social psychology, and that its own progress in the future must be in an essentially socio-psychological direction.

In political science the need of the study of social psychology is not less evident. A host of questions concerning the origin and development of legal and political institutions await a socio-psychological settlement. Government and law are two of the most important products, or rather sides, of the social psychic process, and the attempt to understand them without understanding it is like an attempt to understand an organic species without reference to organic evolution as a whole, or to explain attention without reference to the whole process of the mental life. The natural history of government and of the various forms of government, when it comes to be properly written, must seek the help of social psychology to explain the phenomena with which it deals. Monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, with their variations and "perversions," will be truly explained as phenomena only when they are shown to be expressions of the particular psychical processes which characterize particular stages of social growth, or special social coördinations. The same method of interpretation will have to be applied to the legal systems and institutions which are bound up with government. It will be the further task of political science to show, through the facts of history and ethnography, what forms of government and of law are regularly associated with certain types of social psychic coördination. Thus it is possible that some degree of prevision may be reached as regards the relation

between a society and its form of government; but no exact prevision, since, as individual psychology teaches, no two psychical coördinations can ever be exactly alike. On this account a socio-psychological interpretation of political and legal phenomena will, perhaps, be unacceptable to those who, like Comte, long for a rigid science of society, a "social physics," which shall make possible in social life the exact prevision of the mathematical sciences.

Concerning the inner life of the state, as well as concerning political and legal systems, social psychology will have somewhat to say. The problem of political parties, of their rise, growth, and disappearance, lies almost wholly within its territory. Here, too, belongs the explanation of those disturbances of the political life called revolutions. The objective interpretations of revolutions have notoriously failed; none of them have been principles of universal, or almost universal, applicability. If any principle of explanation of universal validity can be found, it must be a socio-psychological principle; for revolutions are matters of social habit, feeling, and belief, that is, of the social psychic process.

The need of social psychology in the judging of social programs for reform may here also be noted. The real objections to the propositions of socialism, for example, are mainly socio-psychological, inasmuch as socialism concerns social organization. A thorough understanding of the psychical life of society will furnish criteria for the just criticism of the propositions of socialism. Through social psychology their consistency or inconsistency with the psychical process of social development can be shown, and a judgment formed as to the probable effect of a socialistic régime upon that process. Not alone the propositions of socialism, but also other programs for social betterment, need the criticism of social psychology. The propositions of the individualist as well as those of the socialist are likely to show the lack of a proper understanding of the psychical life of society. In fact, the proper method of procedure in all attempts at general social betterment can be determined only through social psychology. As individual psychology must underlie the doc-

trine of individual education, so a full knowledge of social psychology must underlie the doctrine of social transformation; that is, a "social pedagogy" or "teleology" must be developed from a knowledge of the processes of normal social growth, of psychical adjustment and readjustment in society, just as pedagogy is developed from a knowledge of similar processes in the individual. When social psychology has reached the completed stage in which it can yield a doctrine of social betterment, or "social teleology," it is possible that there will be one other person beside the socialist who knows exactly what he wants done for the betterment of society; that person will be the social psychologist. The methods of social improvement which he may propose will perhaps not pretend to be so speedy and cocksure as those of socialism, but they will at least have the merit of resting upon a knowledge of the nature of the social process. We claim, therefore, for the study of social psychology ultimately a practical as well as a theoretical value.

We have already reached in our discussion the territory of ethics. In so far as ethics is a social science, it rests upon the facts of the psychical life of society, and so has much to expect from the development of social psychology. The phenomenon of moral valuation affords an illustration. Moral value, like economic value, has now come to be regarded as a social phenomenon; that is, it is regarded as explicable only through the psychical life of society as a whole, not through the life of the individual. The reason why society regards one act as virtuous and another as wicked, one thing as having moral value and another as not, must, in the last resort, be found in the nature of the social psychic process, and can be understood only through understanding it, that is, through social psychology. The relation of beliefs to the moral life is another problem which illustrates the dependence of ethics upon the development of social psychology. The function of beliefs in the moral life of society, especially of the beliefs in God, in the immortality of the soul, and in moral freedom and responsibility, needs to be made out, and to be embodied by ethics in its discussion of the facts of the moral life. Whether the ethical activities of society can be car-

ried on and ethical progress be possible without these beliefs, that is, whether they are essential economies of the social psychic process or not, is a question which social psychology alone can answer, yet a question of the greatest importance to moral as well as social philosophy.

In this article, intended merely as a plea for the study of social psychology, it is not the place to discuss either the difficulties of the construction of such a science or the methods it should employ. Of these we shall speak later. What we trust we have made clear is the need of such a science in any rational attempt to solve the problems of the social sciences. It is certainly essential to the interpretation of the societal process as a whole. It is needed in economics, political science, and ethics to correct and supplement prevailing theories and to formulate new ones. Finally, it is needed for the criticism of false and for the construction of wise programs for social betterment.

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